SPAWN

THE DARK AGES

21

DIGITAL EDITION

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TODD McFARLANE AND IMAGE COMICS PRESENT

SINS OF THE HELLSPAWN

STORY STEVE NILES

PENCILS NAT JONES

INKS KEVIN CONRAD

COVER ASHLEY WOOD

LETTERING RICHARD STARKINGS
AND COMICRAFT'S OSCAR GONGORA

COLOR TODD BROEKER

SUMMARY

Covenant lays half unconscious in the leprotic dungeon in which he was thrown. In the blackness, half-eaten by rats, he makes contact with two other prisoners, but continues to drift in and out of consciousness. Covenant is visited by Marcellus, they boy he saved; the same boy who turned him in. Marcellus wants the Hellspawn to see his fate and to see Brakert's plan: To avoid starvation, Brakert had been farming humans for consumption. But Covenant remembers an old lesson from Cog, and turns the tables on his captors.

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SPAWN The Dark Ages #21 November 2000. First Printing. Published by IMAGE COMICS 1071 N. Batavia St., Suite A, Orange, CA 92867. $2.50 USA/$4.00 CAN. Spawn, its logo and its symbol are registered trademarks 2000 of Todd McFarlane Productions, Inc. All other related characters are TM and © 2000 Todd McFarlane Productions, Inc. All rights reserved. Any similarities to persons living or dead is purely coincidental. With exception of artwork used for review purposes, none of the contents of this publication may be reprinted without the permission of Todd McFarlane. **PRINTED IN CANADA.**

They came by sea on ships called Drakken.
They came for one purpose and one purpose only; to take what was defenseless and steal it, kill it, beat it. Strangle it until there was nothing left of value.
Nothing left but useless scraps of humanity devoured.
They are the Vikings. Brave men who travel the seas in search of new lands to conquer...but this was no conquest. This was a rape.
The rape of Rhyll.

Now it is over. The food has been eaten, the supplies have been purged, the women used and the men beaten for entertainment.
Those who survived retreat into the woods where a legend has grown, where fear hangs ripe from the trees.
But, truth be told, their options weighed, the survivors of Rhyll would rather go up against a monster that shreds men and women, then face the Viking hordes again.
Only a few citizens remain as the Norsemen prepare to leave; the old men, too frail to retreat, the women in shock, violated, any hope of life beyond the wood forever destroyed.
And there is the boy, Alek.
Rhyll was dead.
Alek its sole survivor.
Rhyll's only child.

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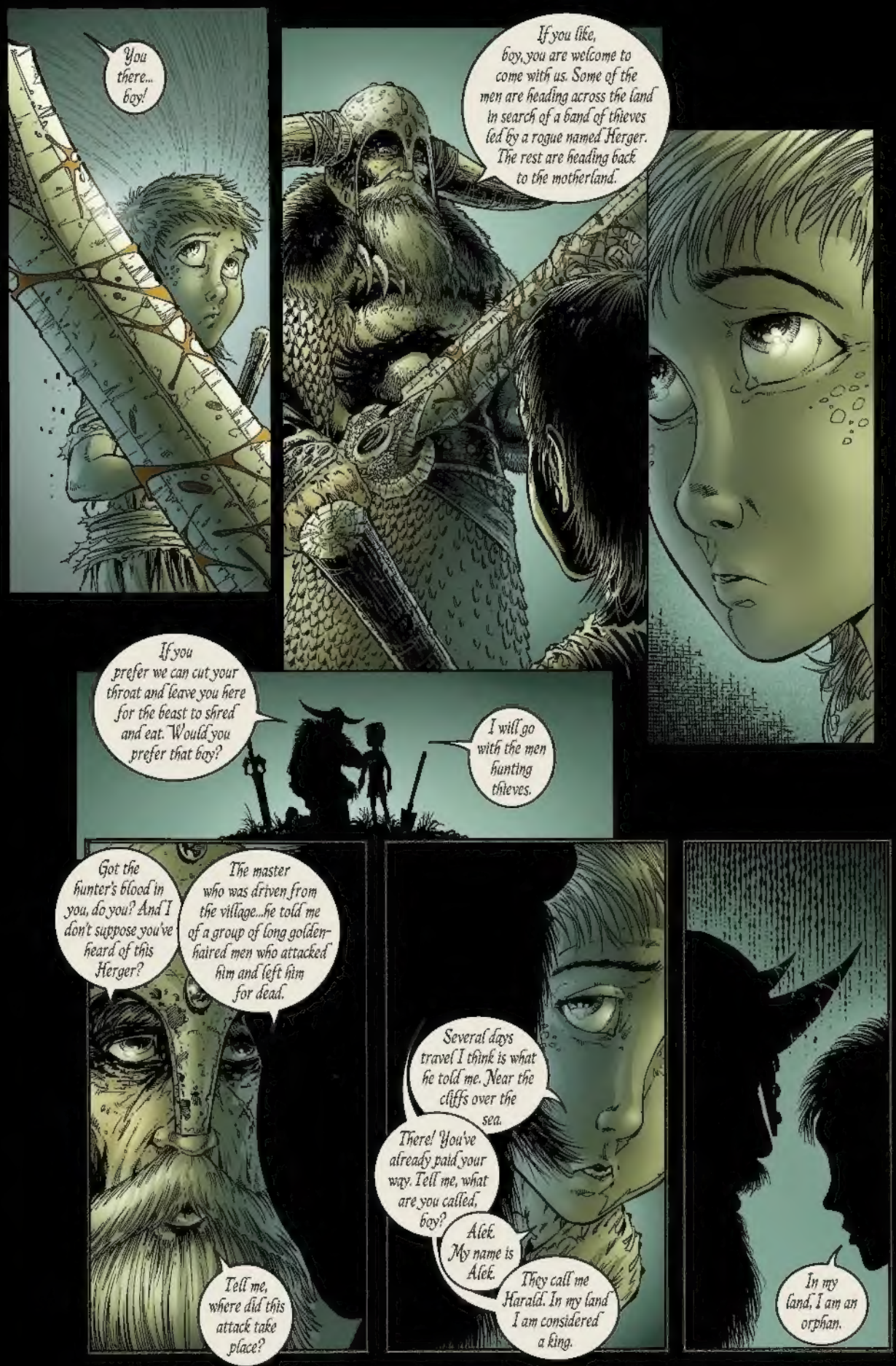
You there... boy!
If you like, boy, you are welcome to come with us. Some of the men are heading across the land in search of a band of thieves led by a rogue named Herger. The rest are heading back to the motherland.
If you prefer we can cut your throat and leave you here for the beast to shred and eat. Would you prefer that boy?
I will go with the men hunting thieves.
Got the hunter's blood in you, do you? And I don't suppose you've heard of this Herger?
The master who was driven from the village...he told me of a group of long golden-haired men who attacked him and left him for dead.
Tell me, where did this attack take place?
Several days travel I think is what he told me. Near the cliffs over the sea.
There! You've already paid your way. Tell me, what are you called, boy?
Alek. My name is Alek.
They call me Harald. In my land I am considered a king.
In my land, I am an orphan.

Do you hate us for what we did, boy?
I'm too small to hate.
But given the chance to kill us one by one, would you, boy?
Given the chance...I would.
The curtain of death has closed on Alek's birth village, but he still has hope in his small heart.
He knows that Covenant is out there somewhere and someday their paths will cross again.
And maybe then, the boy will be given the chance for vengeance. Maybe then he will watch the heads slowly pulled from the marauders' shoulders, and he himself will thrust a rusty lance through the heart of their Viking leader.
For now, he will remain with the Vikings.
For now, he will dream of vengeance down the road.

Meanwhile...
...in Turnbold.
Things have taken a turn.
Turnbold, a city of peace turned the City of Thieves took a new prisoner into their midst.
They intended to kill him, maim him... if he was deemed worthy they thought they might strip him for meat.
This is what they do with the prisoners in Turnbold. They are killed for meat.
Now, all of Turnbold's plans are moot. For the prisoner that they took was no ordinary disfigured man.
This prisoner was Hellspawn.
P...please... Leech sorry... Leech's... serve you now! Leech serve you!
Be quiet you insignificant gnat! Can't you see he means to do us in!
I have no intention of doing you harm. You are going to do it for me... to each other. I will spare the survivor.

...mercy...
Now... start eating.
Does the punishment ever truly fit the crime?
This is the first question that creeps into the Hellspawn's mind as he watches the impossible unfold before his eyes.
Two men trying to eat each other alive to survive.

This is evil, Covenant thinks, this is pure evil. Why did they ever choose me.
Nothing he ever did, no matter how many infidels he killed, could amount to this, could it?
Selfish cowardice can make a man do many things. Things even a spawn of Hell cannot stand to bare witness to.
...s...stop... stop... Enough!

H...he's... dead...I...win...I...win... you...p...promised! You promised!
Yes I did, but my honor was long ago taken from me.
But I ate him! I killed him! I won!
One more transgression should hardly matter now.
Covenant!
William? Brodi?

Not as pretty as you imagined us, eh?
Let us have him, Covenant. Nobody can take your honor unless you allow them. Keep your word. Leave Marcellus to us.
We'll make sure he stays with us.
But.. I plan to burn this den of evil.. all of it, the prison...the city... to the ground.
And burn it you should.
We'll stay here with the princess and make sure he burns with us.
But I could take you with me.
Look at us. I have barely the flesh to cover my bones, and even that is rotting as we speak. My time is short, so is poor Brodi's here. Burn this place. You will be doing all of us a great service.
Very well. If this is what you wish.

It was good to have met you Hellspawn
You knew? How?
You were quite the talker in your sleep my boy. You got a bad deal. Go out there and take back the life you lost. Do it for me and Brodi here.
I will.

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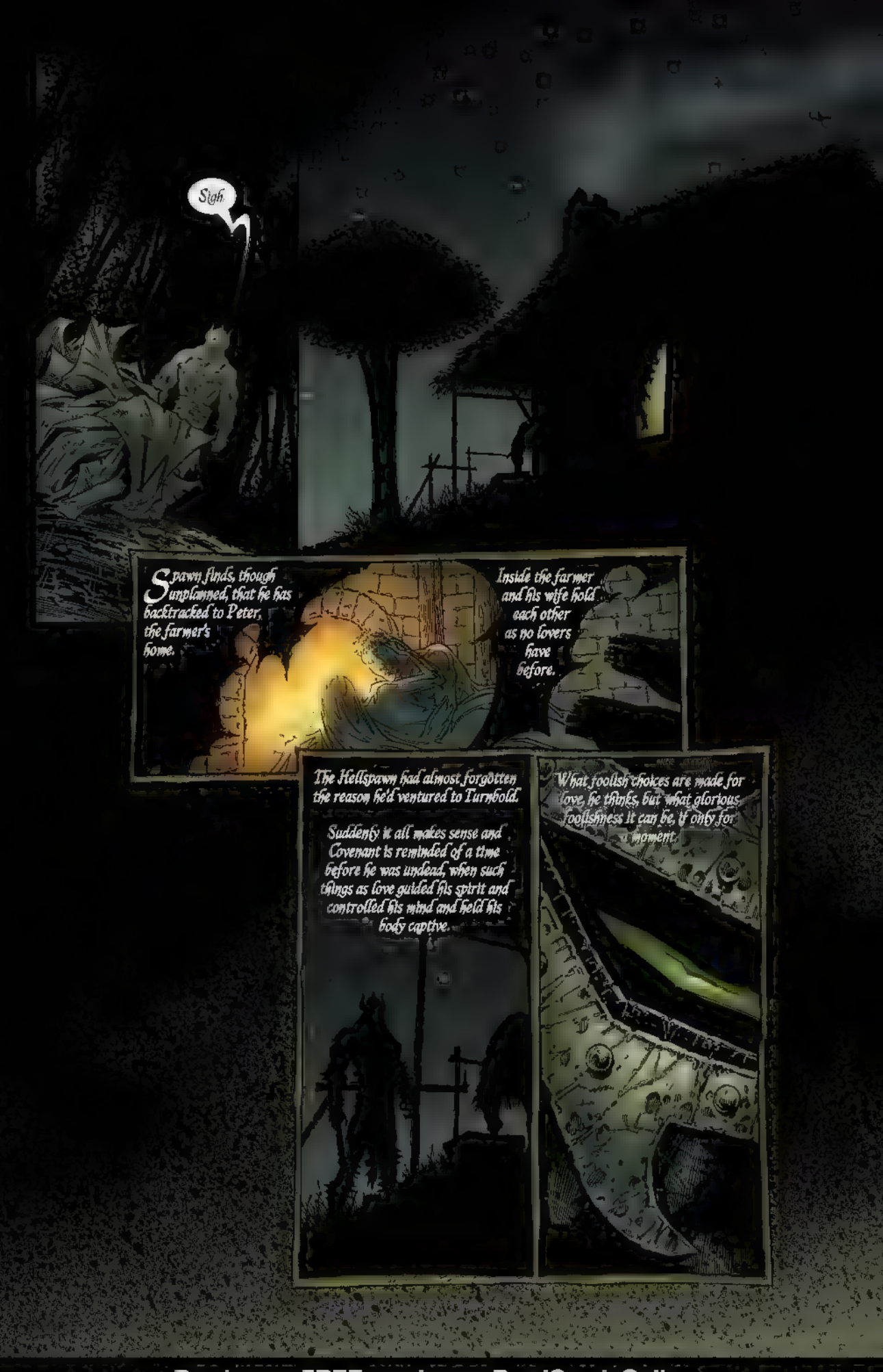
The city of thieves ignites freely. Years of rot have turned the timber to kindling.
They are spared the fire, but only by a quicker, less painful death.

The Hellspawn emerges from the smoke and screams. Already he feels the temporary surge of darkness subsiding and though he enjoyed the feeling of power in his veins, he is glad to be rid of the Hell-born force.
He has learned valuable lessons on this dark and bloody night. Things that he must weigh as he ventures into life without the Necroplasm.
There is greater power in facing and accepting death than ruling all the lands of the world.
There is greater power in selflessness than in greed, and it is better to be human than a monster in any form.
But above all, Covenant has learned one priceless lesson that he always knew, but never followed.
Think before you strike. The mind is always the greater power over brute strength...
...but brute strength comes in very handy on occasion.

Another batch of rotten souls for the pits. It does not matter that he served them up. They would have been delivered today or tomorrow. He will not accept credit.
But for the good men who perished in the fire, the Hellspawn mourns. Good men. Brave to the core of their hearts.
He hopes that they will rest in peace. No more dark, cruel cells for them. Covenant imagines William and Brodi healed and healthy, in a vast field overlooking a limitless ocean.
That is what they deserve.
That, he prays, is what they find...beyond.

WANTED
for
MURDERS
AD 1355
NO GOLD PIECES
TO THE KILLER OF
THE BEAST OF
...he...
He, he, he he!
Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!


Sigh.
Spawn finds, though unplanned, that he has backtracked to Peter, the farmer's home.
Inside the farmer and his wife hold each other as no lovers have before.
The Hellspawn had almost forgotten the reason he'd ventured to Turnbold.
Suddenly it all makes sense and Covenant is reminded of a time before he was undead, when such things as love guided his spirit and controlled his mind and held his body captive.
What foolish choices are made for love, he thinks, but what glorious foolishness it can be, if only for a moment.

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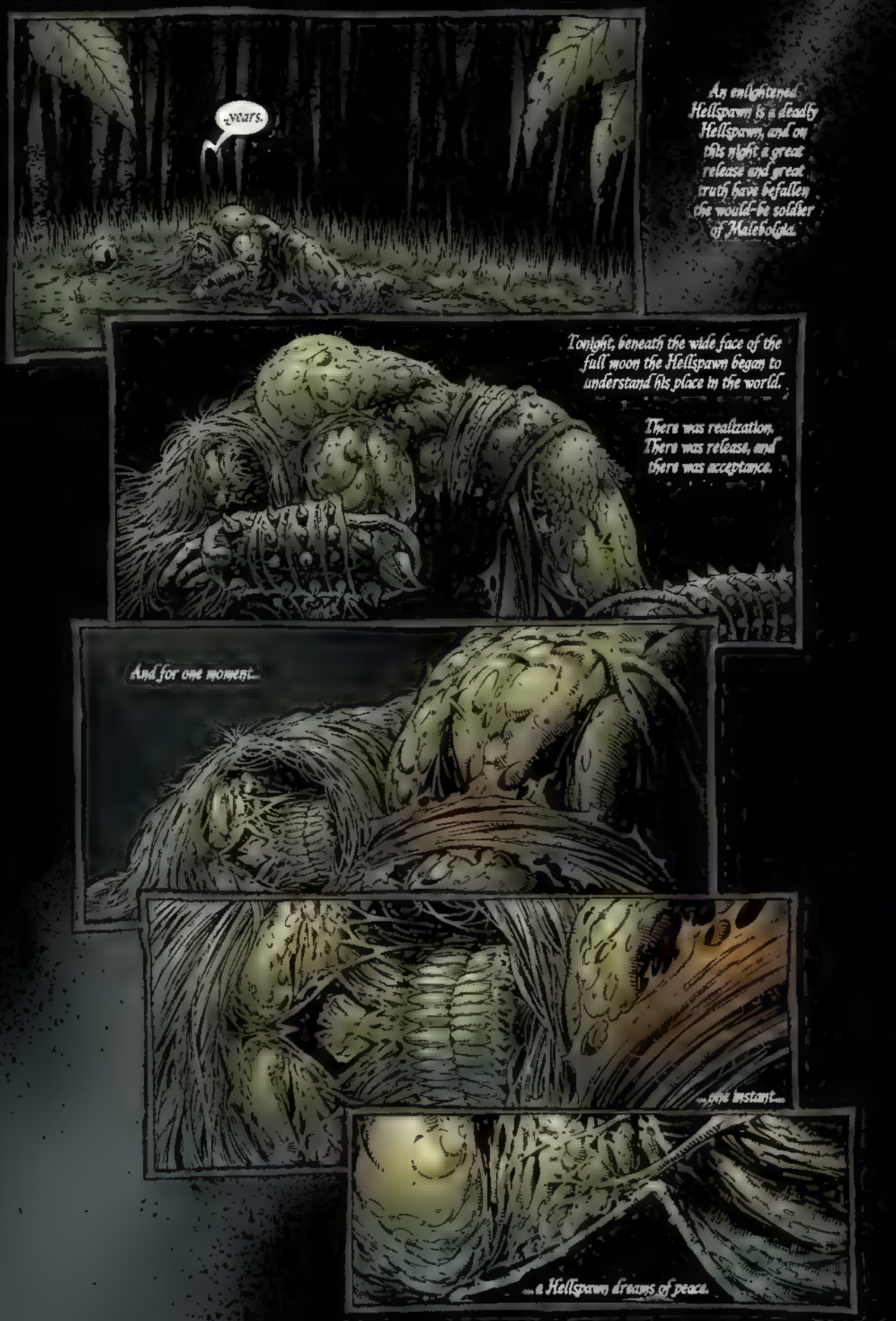
As the Hellspawn walks into the night and back toward the great Black Wood, it strikes him that he has made a fatal error in judgment.
It was not his love for Shiann that drove him toward bloodlust and Hell. He abandoned her when she was with child. That was his first sin.
He had gone off to fight an enemy that was not truly an enemy. They did not attack. They did not threaten his land, nor his home or family.
They simply believed in a God that Iain Covenant did not believe in.

It was not the blood on his hand that delivered him to Hell, it was his blind, thoughtless cruelty, his selfish arrogance.
He had abandoned the woman he loved and the baby in her womb.
He had attacked an enemy without true cause.
How could I have been so blind? My sins are plain to see. I was not cheated I built this damnation. I created this hell.
They are not realizations to be proud of, but for a Hellspawn they are one more brick in the wall between the true enemy, the gods of darkness and of light.
If he is to escape the War, the healing of his heart is the first step to the creation of the greatest weapon against the collectors of souls.
Tired. So tired. Haven't slept in...


„years.
An enlightened Hellspawn is a deadly Hellspawn, and on this night a great release and great truth have befallen the would-be soldier of Malebolgia.
Tonight, beneath the wide face of the full moon the Hellspawn began to understand his place in the world.
There was realization. There was release, and there was acceptance.
And for one moment...
...one instant...
...a Hellspawn dreams of peace.

North.
Elsewhere, the night is not so restful.
For the Druid who holds the Hellspawn's Necroplasm, nightmares would be a welcome relief.
He hears voices in the night calling to him.
It is you who does this, is it not? Evil lures evil.
They are strange voices, inhuman, unnatural.
Ahhh!
I was a fool to think I could wage a war against the new gods. Their influence has swept the land like plague.

Iceni? Are you out there? Makus?
Night breeds fear, and fear gives birth to doubt.
I was a fool to not accept the fate of my precious sect. Such a fool.
In the morning, the Druid priest will curse his words and recant his doubt.
Makus... where did you go this time?
But this is not the morning.

This is the night.
Makus... no.
And at night, terror rules the earth.

DARKNESS